

Lt. Governor Brown, Business Leaders Promote, Expand Healthiest Maryland Initiative

Initiative gains members on lower Eastern Shore

Lt. Governor's Office News Release

SALISBURY, Md. (August 20, 2010) - At a press conference today at Salisbury University, Lt. Governor Anthony G. Brown, Health and Mental Hygiene Deputy Secretary Fran Phillips, Perdue Farms Chairman Jim Perdue, City of Salisbury Mayor James Ireton, Salisbury University Provost Dr. Diane Allen and Cindy Lunsford, Chief Operating Officer of Peninsula Regional Medical Center announced the expansion of the 'Healthiest Maryland' initiative. The initiative, which was launched in May and now has over 70 members, is one of the key action items recommended by the Maryland Health Quality and Cost Council to Governor Martin O'Malley and promotes health management practices in the workplace. Immediately prior to the press conference, Brown led business leaders on a 'health walk' across the university's campus, promoting one of several activities businesses can encourage to improve employees' health.

"Governor O'Malley and I are proud of the progress we have made in the last four years to improve public health in Maryland and expand access to quality care. Through our partnerships and critical choices, we are better positioned than any other state to successfully implement national health reform," said Lt. Governor Brown. "But there is still much work to be done to improve the health of our state. Healthiest Maryland will encourage businesses and residents to focus on wellness and preventative care and create healthy work environments that ensure that the healthiest choice the easiest choice. With the dedication and assistance of their employers, Marylanders will gain the tools and guidance necessary to adopt healthy lifestyles for themselves and their families."

This morning, leadership from more than 15 lower Eastern Shore businesses gathered for a breakfast and roundtable discussion regarding the benefits of the Healthiest Maryland initiative at Salisbury University. Some of Maryland's largest employers - including the University of Maryland Medical System, PNC Bank, Johns Hopkins University and Perdue Farms, as well as the State of Maryland - have already enrolled in Healthiest Maryland and declared their commitment to implement policies and practices that promote prevention and wellness. Participating employers commit to making the health of their employees a top priority by increasing access to preventative services, expanding healthy food and beverage choices and promoting other workplace wellness programs.

"Everybody who participates in Healthiest Maryland comes out a winner," said Fran Phillips, Deputy Secretary of Public Health Services for the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH). "Employees who take care of themselves are more productive, more productive employees boost the business bottom line and Maryland families will have a healthier, happier and more active bread-winner."

Studies show that for every dollar an employer invests in the health of its employees, a return of \$3 to \$6 can be expected. These savings are the result of reduced health care costs, reduced absenteeism and increased productivity. Specifically, worksite health promotion programs like Healthiest Maryland have cut sick leave absenteeism by 27 percent and lowered costs associated with worker's compensation and disability management claims by 32 percent.

"At Perdue, we've found that our associate health improvement programs have yielded measurable benefits for both our associates and our company. I encourage business leaders to join me in committing to the Healthiest Maryland Businesses project and to promoting wellness in the workplace," said Jim Perdue, Chairman of Perdue Incorporated.

"As public sector employees, we with the City of Salisbury embrace the opportunity to take a leadership role in the kickoff campaign for 'Healthiest Maryland' on the Lower Shore," said Salisbury Mayor James Ireton.

Healthiest Maryland helps business leaders to reach their goals through a self-assessment of strengths and areas for improvement in promoting employee health. The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, under the guidance of the Health Quality and Cost Council, will provide technical assistance through online resources and help connect participating employers with accredited wellness programs, professional organizations and voluntary health associations.

"Salisbury University is committed to fostering a healthy workplace for faculty and staff, and encouraging wellness among our students," said Dr. Diane Allen, Salisbury University Provost and Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs. "This initiative compliments our 'Healthy U of Delmarva' program, which already helps residents of the Lower Eastern Shore make healthy lifestyle changes. We are excited to join communities and organizations across the state in creating a healthier Maryland."

"For our employees, we view them as our greatest asset and we incentivize them for practicing healthy behaviors and participating in wellness and health improvement activities. We are pleased the administration recognizes not only the cost savings associated with health prevention and worksite wellness programs, but also the true health and wellbeing that is afforded to our employees as a result of these efforts," said Cindy Lunsford, Chief Operating Officer of Peninsula Regional Medical Center.

Lt. Governor Brown, in his capacity as the Chair of the Maryland Health Quality and Cost Council, launched the Healthiest Maryland initiative in Baltimore's Inner Harbor in May 2010. Brown will continue to encourage all Maryland companies to participate in the initiative and will hold a series of events around the state to educate business owners about the initiative's benefits. Brown leads the O'Malley-Brown administration's health care portfolio that has made significant reforms to the state's health care system and expanded access to health coverage to 205,000 Marylanders who were uninsured four years ago.

In addition to chairing the Health Quality and Cost Council, Brown co-chairs the Maryland Health Care Reform Coordinating Council. During the 2010 Legislative Session, Brown led efforts to pass significant health care legislation that fights fraud, waste and abuse in the Medicaid system and creates a "Medical Home" program that provides incentives to primary care practices to promote preventative and coordinated care. A veteran of the Iraq War and a Colonel in the U.S. Army Reserves, Brown also championed a legislative package in 2008 and 2009 to improve mental and behavioral health services for Maryland's veterans.

To join the Healthiest Maryland initiative, visit
<http://spdev.dhmdh.md.gov:21115/healthiest/SitePages/Home.aspx>.

Michael Raia

Press Secretary

Office of Lt. Governor Anthony G. Brown

Annapolis, MD 21401

410-260-3888 (o)

443-336-3032 (c)

mraia@gov.state.md.us